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ABSTRACT

Noting that higher education across the centuries has constituted a continuing dialogue between the minds of ancestors and of contemporaries, this paper traces the history of the common or core curriculum at the university level and warns against the current state of affairs. The paper proposes that a pedagogy is needed that can both discern and propagate, and affirm and hold together a community of ideas. It suggests that without this core, humans will be losing their most valued heritage--their collective memory. This historical account of the core curriculum is begun with examples from United States institutions of higher learning, with emphasis on the curriculum begun at Harvard in the 1630s, and continues through the presidency of Charles W. Eliot in 1869, the statement on general education in 1945, and the 1978 report on the core curriculum. In the paper, the differences in what was and is now considered core curriculum are discussed and the trend to more science courses and specialized electives in literature at the expense of classical humanities courses is protested. (MKM)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

CORE, CANON, CURRICULUM

Harry Levin

It is a very genuine pleasure to be here; but I feel that I should not be meeting your gracious invitation with due candor if I did not confess at once to the limits of my credentials for addressing a body so nationally representative and so professionally active. My own experience as a college student and a university teacher can claim some amount of length, but rather too little of breadth. It started when I matriculated as a freshman at Harvard fifty-one years ago last September, and has never been disengaged from that association, except for brief academic visits elsewhere--and for special occasions like the present, which I especially value because they mitigate the inherent provincialism of my educational orbit. Now it might be observed, to Harvard's possible advantage, that no one could act as a typical spokesman for it; certainly I could make no pretense of doing so. When I arrived there first, as a high-school graduate from the Middle West, the majority of the student body was composed of graduates from northeastern preparatory schools. In those days, too, I was counted among an ethnic minority unwelcomed by anything like Affirmative Action. But, since our theme is one that calls for frequent illustration, you will understand when I draw examples from what has become most familiar to me through the habit of years.

This reversion to provinciality allows us to begin near the beginning--at least for English-speaking institutions of higher learning within our hemisphere. Any innovation had to be a continuation, though with the divergence that was then separating Puritans from Anglicans at Cambridge University: considerably more emphasis on Hebrew, Aramaic, the Old Testament, and such anti-scholastic Calvinists as Petrus Ramus. Otherwise, the original course of study doggedly emulated its English model. Latin was not so much taught

as taken for granted, the idiom of lectures, recitations, oral examinations, other exercises, and ceremonials. Politics and science entered the discussion so far as they had been treated by Aristotle or other ancients. All subjects were prescribed, hour by hour, day by day, year by year, and presented often by the same tutors. A theological school would not be consecrated until Harvard went Unitarian in the nineteenth century. Yet there was a central concern for religion and ethics in its earliest teaching, and many of its first alumni were ordained in the Congregational clergy. The pamphlet New England's First Fruits, published in 1643 seven years after the founding, specified the college's purpose in traditional terms: "to advance learning and to perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches."

As at the scholarly foundations of the mother country, potential clerics would soon be outnumbered by secular pupils forming the bourgeois-democratic equivalent of a gentry, lawyers and merchants who would manage the break with England during the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, in becoming a private institution, and incidentally presuming to call itself a university, the college would be breaking its ties with church along with state. "Liberi, liberaliter educati." So President Urian Oakes had addressed the graduating seniors in 1677: "Gentlemen (or free men), liberally educated." The etymological links are fraught with implications. The Seven Liberal Arts of the Middle Ages, classically distinguished from the mechanical arts, but avoiding our later distinction between art and science, had been grounded upon the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and had proceeded through the Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, plus music). These were brought up to date by the Hellenism of the Renaissance and the Hebraism of the Reformation. I realize that to talk about updating, in connection with the revival of antiquities, is a paradox

which might not have amused John Dewey. My generation must indeed be the last for which four years of prerequisite Latin spelled the difference between the S.B. degree and a baccalaureate in arts.

The ancient Greeks were in the happy position of not needing linguistic prerequisites; not so the Romans, whose literature and culture were remolded by Greek precedents. According to Solon, who was a didactic poet as well as an Athenian statesman, all that youth really needed to learn were swimming and reading. Disciplines of unique richness, both gymnastic and dialectical, were developed out of those bare essentials. With the development of the genres in poetry and prose, came an unprecedented accumulation which had to be sorted out. Texts, while being edited and commented upon, were also catalogued and ranked by the rhetoricians and grammarians of the Alexandrian period. Their selections were sumptuous—the verbal root is that of our word criticism. Those canonical listings included, for instance, precisely nine lyric poets and ten classic orators. It was likewise agreed that there had been three masters of Old Comedy: Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Cratinus. Yet of their dramaturgy we possess eleven plays by Aristophanes, and merely excerpted fragments from the other two. Similarly, considering the epic, Quintilian would cite four paragons. Homer still predominates among them, as he did for his compatriots; Hesiod survives to be read and discussed now and then, though primarily by classicists; Antimachus and Panyasis have become ghosts, whose names are almost totally forgotten.

The classical triumvirate most indelibly stamped upon our memories is that of the great tragedians; and we do have seven tragedies from AEschylus, seven more from Sophocles, and nineteen from Euripides. But AEschylus and Euripides seem to have written nearly a hundred each, while Sophocles—allowably the greatest—was the most prolific of all three. How much of those survivals do we owe to principles of choice, to vicissitudes of popularity, to aftereffects

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of tradition, or to accidents of material circumstance? Menander, until a few papyri were discovered in our own century, seemed to have left no more than an honored name and some sententious quotations. The Epistles of Phalaris were generally accredited until 1699, when Richard Bentley ostracized them by demonstrating that they had been forgeries. Curricular adoptions can doubtless turn out to be as fallible as the recommendations of the Swedish Academy or the Book-of-the-Month Club. Religious scriptures may have been compiled by analogous procedures, involving both inheritance and judgment: the Old Testament through the Rabbis, the New through the Church Fathers. But these have been consolidated by the ecclesiastical sanctions that anthologized and canonized them as a corpus of sacred writing, while excluding or secularizing the Apocrypha. Bible was originally a plural noun: τα βιβλία, the books, the books, the book of books.

Canon meant a ruling in the legal sense, as it still does for the church. In the literary sense it has signified a norm, a paradigm, a set of models. This consisted of auctores, authors designated as authorities to be heeded in their respective spheres, and collectively accepted to constitute the authorized body of knowledge as it then stood--in the minds of men, if not in the mind of God. Ernst Robert Curtius has impressively shown how the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian elements were compounded to make up the canons of medieval Latinity. This is what had bound culture together, continuously for so many centuries, in that nostalgic unity extolled by Henry Adams: a unity attained at the price of stasis, it might be said, a derivative culture sustained by a clerical elite. Adams was lamenting the divisive trends of modern multiplicity, of that kinetic impulsion he symbolized in the dynamo. But it is the nature of literature and of knowledge, as it has been of human experience itself, to keep moving on, for better or for worse. In the changing light of vistas opened up by the age of Humanism, the old prescriptive syllabus would have to

be revised, absorbing new inclusions of recognized importance while dropping out extraneous remnants of obsolete lore. Thus the initial Harvard curriculum was more or less contemporary with the spirit of its century.

That is not to say that there has been no lag, as there usually is between reality and the paradigms delegated to represent it. Textbooks and manuals could be rewritten as sciences progressed; training in rhetoric and elocution could focus on current events. But the canon had been preserved to a point where the University of North Carolina, opening in 1785, could pride itself on offering--in the words of its ^{president,} ~~present~~, Joseph Caldwell--"a hard core of classicism and theology." These were viewed as the most appropriate steps toward the fulfilment of socio-cultural goals: humane cultivation to be combined with religious commitment. Yale, which had early functioned as a standing rebuke to Harvard's relaxing orthodoxy (even as Princeton would be standing up against Yale's), under pressure by alumni to bridge the widening gap between the academy and the world, responded by broadly reaffirming its conservatism through its Influential Report of 1828. A contemporaneous resistance was encountered at Harvard by George Ticknor, who after fifteen years, gave up scholastic reform for the independent researches that led to his pioneering history of Spanish literature. During his professorship he had succeeded in introducing a department of modern languages and the alternative of choosing one of these as a substitute for the Hebrew requirement--in short, an elective breakthrough.

Greek and Latin have been most tenaciously entrenched at the British public schools and Oxbridge, where they furnished a backlog of precept and example to generations of statesmen, civil servants, and empire-builders. Even after "Greats" had ceased to be the sole option, they continued to form the most prestigious one; and their official title, Litterae Humaniores, suggested an

invidious comparison with all other categories of letters or claims to humanity. Their increasing distance from modernity and the narrowing pedantry of their transmission were, for a protracted interval, offset by their social and intellectual cachet. Hence they became the archaic masks of gentlemanly caste, derogated by such positivistic reformers as Herbert Spencer. Compulsory Greek would be cut down, if not eased out, when Charles W. Eliot proposed scientific alternatives. Moving to the presidency of Harvard from a professorship of chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1869, he defended Latin as a discipline--though his support would weaken as Latin's hegemony weakened in the schools. He had begun his transilient inaugural address by taking a skeptically neutral overview of "the endless controversies whether language, philosophy, mathematics, or science, supply the best mental training, whether general education should be chiefly literary or chiefly scientific..."

His premise was the resolve that an equal place should be accorded to all serious branches of learned instruction or inquiry. Only by acting on it could a college become a university, in the fullest significance of universitas. Any single program set for all, limited and limiting, had to depend upon donnish tutors rather than to enlist professorial specialists for its faculty. Departments could now be organized, and their more scholarly efforts coordinated through a graduate school. The European continent, preeminently Germany, had heretofore been the training ground for specialized erudition. Concurrently it inspired the founding of Johns Hopkins, which commenced at the most professional level, even as Harvard was struggling upwards toward it from collegiate beginnings. Princeton was suspicious of this novel eclecticism, and Eliot was criticized by President James McCosh for distracting the outlook of ministerial candidates. Free election had been posited upon entrance requirements far more rigorous than anything we could exact from our applicants

nowadays, and it presupposed fixed courses during the freshman year. It conferred an unaccustomed dignity, together with a liberating atmosphere, insofar as it encouraged an undergraduate to feel as if he were captain of his soul, if not master of his fate. How well or ill he mastered the challenge to do his own thing would be put to subsequent tests by progressively fluid curricula.

As for the professors, except for an occasional naturalist or man of letters, few among them had previously felt such incentives toward research and publication. Eliot could recruit Henry Adams to inaugurate seminars in American history, albeit briefly and hesitantly; he could be persuaded by his cousin, Charles Eliot Norton, to introduce the study of Fine Arts; he himself could persuade a vacillating young M.D., William James, to animate a dynamic philosophical school. But the elective system, as might have been expected, had to face a good deal of inertia, opposition, and protest from those who had already settled into a complacently classicistic status quo. Traditionalism, it must have seemed to them, was being profaned within one of its hallowed shrines. Mere anarchy was loosed upon the world. "Educational laissez-faire" is the mildest phrase unleashed by Eliot's sharpest Harvard critic, Irving Babbitt, and yet today it sounds like a reasonably objective characterization. When outside critics likened the open curriculum to a cafeteria or a department store or a mail-order catalogue, unwittingly their scornful analogies made clear why it was bound to succeed. In its egalitarian openness and in its compendious pluralism it was all so very American, a resounding challenge to the traditions of the Old World like one of Walt Whitman's manifestoes!

Not that the counterarguments were lacking in substance. On the contrary: though the Eliot plan—or planlessness—may have prevailed by 1900 in most American universities, most of the readjustments since then have been moving in the

opposite direction. But, before we consider that train of reversal, I should like to glance for a moment at the program of an actual student who elected his courses freely. This one graduated in the year after C.W. Eliot's retirement, 1910, and he happened to be the president's youthful relative, T.S. Eliot. His four-year record comprises three courses in Greek, two in Latin, two in French, two in German, four in English Literature, four in Comparative Literature, two in Fine Arts, three in Philosophy, one in History, and one in Government. Among his instructors were Babbitt, George Pierce Baker, C.H. Haskins, William Alan Neilson, George Herbert Palmer, E.K. Rand, F.N. Robinson, and George Santayana. Obviously, the undergraduate was father to the man of letters, and his careful selection would have constituted a strong major in Comparative Literature. He also took a course in English Composition from the famous "Copey," but was put off by the mediocre tastes and the classroom mannerisms that impressed so many pupils of lesser caliber, and he learned the most about writing poetry by casually picking up the Student Union's copy of Arthur Symonds' book on the French Symbolists.

Our registrars would have quickly noted that the list contains no science. Actually, during his three intensive years as a graduate student in Philosophy, he would fulfil a departmental requirement by taking a laboratory course in experimental psychology. Moreover, through five courses in Indic Philology, he would extend his philosophical interests to Oriental thought. Well, you may point out, T.S. Eliot must have been an exceptionally purposeful prodigy, about as rare a pupil as John Stuart Mill. I would agree, and go on to wonder about the coherence or the confusion in the programs of those less discriminating classmates who regarded Charles T. Copeland as a mental stimulus. Nor should the question be confined to the circumstances at Harvard. I believe that Eliot would unavoidably have become an eminent writer, though probably a somewhat different one, if he had stayed home in Saint Louis and studied at the institution

first presided over by his grandfather, Washington University. After all, Willa Cather, fifteen years before, had read her classics not far away, at the recently established land-grant university in Lincoln, Nebraska. It had been the distant landscape of Vergil's Georgics that framed her evocations--elegant in style yet epical in feeling--of the prairie settlement, the immigrant farmer, and above all the pioneer woman. Tradition works in different ways upon individual talents.

One episode, which occurred shortly after President Eliot retired, stands out in ironic contrast to his curricular role. This was the exfoliation of fifty volumes sponsored by a commercial publisher (without much profit to the editor), permissively if misleadingly advertised as The Harvard Classics and more familiarly known as "Dr. Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf of Books." Half a million sets were to be vended on the bland assurance that an enterprising workman could liberally educate himself by browsing through them at the rate of fifteen minutes a day. Why, then, should anyone waste four consecutive years in Academe? Once again that Yankee Puritan, a character of formidable influence and respectability, was charting the easiest currents of the American mainstream. Most of the editorial responsibility--the canvassing of materials, the text, the introductions, the footnotes--had been deputed to a humanist colleague, the Scottish-born Neilson, Professor of English at Harvard and at Columbia, afterward to be President of Smith College. Assessing such compilations, one can always quibble over what's in and what's out. It cannot be seriously doubted that those 22,000 pages were worth the shelf-space they occupied, whether or not they offered an effective pedagogical technique. But the contradiction was that Eliot, having as an educator repudiated the idea of a canon, of a collection documenting the march of civilization, had returned to it as a publicist.

By that time a pendulum swing was affecting policies at Harvard. Eliot's successor, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, tended to be more interested in the college than in the graduate school, and more influenced by British than by Germanic prototypes. Even before he assumed the presidency, he had helped to institute an honors degree--a privilege necessarily attained through a coherent arrangement of courses, up to half the total load. This principle, the counterpart of what has been more commonly termed a "major," gradually and equably stipulated that every student commit himself to a "field of concentration." Under the complementary heading of "distribution" he had to pass a course in each of several other diversified areas. Lowell's reforms sought to humanize a corporate expansion, and to retain the personal network without which education could have little meaning, by a tutorial method supplementing the classroom and a housing project modelled on the Oxford and Cambridge colleges. The houses were more than dormitories, but less than Balliols or Trinitys. The tutors supplemented the lecturers, but did not have much chance to modify the overriding tendencies toward departmentalization and specialization. Passing through Harvard College in the final years of the Lowell regime, I was schooled in both unity and diversity, but puzzled as to how the twain could meet.

Relatively younger universities, though they may have found it easier than Harvard to step off the beaten one-way track, were quicker in reacting against the disorientations of laissez-faire. Columbia College, after the First World War, replaced some of its introductory surveys with interdepartmental groups discussing a sequence of key documents in the history of civilization. All too temporarily during the Twenties the University of Wisconsin fostered its Experimental College, which devoted two full years to parallel sequences in Hellenic and American civilization. Perhaps the most celebrated experiment was launched at the University of Chicago, and more stringently pursued at

Saint John's College (Annapolis), during the Thirties. This eventuated in a publishing enterprise not unlike Dr. Eliot's, President Robert W. Hutchins' Great Books of the Western World. Dr. Hutchins' overlapping shelf (1952) was never and more capacious than Eliot's (1910), though--unlike its predecessor--it did not try to touch upon the East. But those "hundred best" had been approved as the basis of a curriculum which, on the whole, reverted to the orthodoxies of classicism in literature and scholasticism in philosophy. As for science, the problem was to convey it by such bookish means. Euclid might still be trusted on geometry, or Lavoisier on the elements of chemistry, but could physiology be adequately imparted by assigning Galen on the natural faculties?

Harvard was a relative newcomer to the countermovement. Consequently it could profit from prior experiments and locate the issues against a national perspective in 1945, when it published its widely circulating "red book," General Education in a Free Society. This reported on two years of broad consultation and self-critical deliberation, particularly concerned with responding to postwar challenges. Accordingly, after reviewing the current disparities of secondary education, it recognized that colleges must henceforth be filling in certain matters which were no longer considered fundamental at high schools. Moreover, the newest and grimmest part of the wartime ordeal had brought home the need for improving the layman's acquaintance with science. It would even shock some nuclear scientists into coming out of their laboratories and devising propaedeutic courses--notably President James B. Conant, who had initiated the report. A heightened awareness of international involvements, for a while at any rate, would revive the ever-flagging zeal for foreign languages; but I.A. Richards based the committee's argument on what he labelled "The Copernican step"--the individual's realization that other codes of meaning than their own are predicated upon the existence of other worlds. The principal recommendation of the committee was subsumed by a less inventive expression. "the common core." Previously I have cited a similar application of that

metaphor which harks back to the eighteenth century.

It was recommended that General Education, formulated as "a continuing core for all, taking up at least half a student's time" (actually six courses outside his field) should be subdivided into three areas: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. This has been a customary triad, though somehow in the catalogue the order got reversed, possibly another straw in the winds of change. Preliminary courses were to be required: for the humanities in Great Texts of Literature and for the social sciences in Western Thought and Institutions. Among the natural sciences there was no agreement that the physical and the biological could be encompassed together within a single course. Students could therefore opt for an introduction to the one or the other. That Solomonic decision readmitted an element of election from the very outset. Furthermore, considerations of large enrollment made it necessary to offer several varying introductions in each area. The practical results were somewhat more pluralistic than had been contemplated--too "sweepingly eclectic" for a Chicago colleague, who was more strictly committed to a monolithic scheme. Operating for some thirty-odd years, the plan engendered ideas and enlisted talents, with the enthusiastic backing of the administration that had brought it to birth. Inevitably it would slacken its aims and diffuse its energies, as its innovations became standardized and when nearly every course could be counted in supplementing the first three.

In the mean time, the course-catalogue had been expanding centrifugally toward its present bulk of 812 pages, with offerings in 179 fields--an assortment so rich as to bedazzle a student-body grown larger and more heterogeneous than it had ever been. Furthermore, the tendency of the times, surrounding the campus not only with more and bigger professional schools but with a wider and more distracting array of research institutes and interdisciplinary centers, had been draining off the energies of the faculty. Harvard has accordingly been called upon to reassert the centrality of the college. In response to

the call of a new president in 1973, a new dean appointed seven "task forces" to reconsider numerous aspects of the situation. One of a series, then, the Report on the Core Curriculum, as circulated in 1978, was essentially a working draft, appreciably slighter than the book on General Education, and distinctly less philosophic or panoramic in its orientation. It did make some attempt, as its forerunner had more comprehensively done, to exemplify how its outlines might concretely be realized. But, through intense discussions at many levels, it soon became evident that to spell out educational priorities in advance would be to cast an apple of discord among the departments. Controversy yielded to compromise, and the proposals were passed by the faculty, but not until their specific provisions had been reduced to vague formulas.

The whole procedure might be interpreted, despite some vocal dissent, as a vote of confidence in the centripetal forces. The magic phrase core curriculum proved all the more magical because it had been utilized so frequently before, and the mandate carried was all the more powerful because it came with virtually no strings. Its content could be redefined ab ovo, and the egg in question bears some resemblance to Humpty Dumpty, who wanted words to mean what he chose them to mean. The program is too complex to be set forth here in any detail, and has yet to be digested and understood, though its complexity may well serve the interests of flexibility. Minimally it requires a year or so of an undergraduate's four-year stint, eight to ten half-courses (the variance depending on exemptions and overlaps), to be spaced out and registered within five designated areas and their appertaining subdivisions. Ultimately he will be able to pick them from a list of over 100; about fifty are available at this transitional stage; and most of them sound interesting and inviting. Yet the scale and elasticity of the undertaking prompt an unsettling doubt: where, amid the embarrassment of riches, is the "shared base of knowledge" as it has been described? Given the variety of choices, how can the core be common?

And if it is not common, if it is not the joint intellectual background of educated persons "in the latter part of the twentieth century," how can it still be denominated a core? President Derek C. Bok had written in 1974:

As knowledge expands in every direction, it is hard to agree upon the composition of the common core or to resist the pressure to cover such a vast body of knowledge that the courses become superficial....In fact, the main advantage to be derived from a common curriculum may well have less to do with the importance of the subject matter than with the fact that all students share the same body of knowledge.

This has been reached, suggests The Harvard Crimson, the licensed voice of student opposition, through "bureaucratic jostling and the turf-protecting impulse that accompanies any academic institution." Though I am loth to entertain that stricture, I am at a loss to find much consistency in the determining criteria. Given the longstanding centrality of the humanities among the liberal arts, reaffirmed at the moment by a Rockefeller commission, it must be noted that they have been barely represented on the decisive committee--partly through contingencies with personnel and partly, I suspect, through the growing inclination of newer disciplines to crowd them out. Thus it had been expected that most of these courses would be devised ad hoc; nevertheless the popular "Introduction to Economics" has been rechristened "Social Analysis 10" and, in my opinion justifiably, has been adopted. But no such welcome was extended to staple courses in the Bible or the works of Shakespeare: are we to assume that they no longer pertain to a common core? The literary courses tend to be potpourris, organized--so the guidelines advise--according to genre. Among the major genres the novel is well accounted for; but no such account is rendered of the epic, of tragedy, or of comedy; and it is no adequate compensation to see the minor genres in evidence: the pastoral, the medieval romance, the conte fantastique. In short, the books assigned for reading are not necessarily Great Books, whereas the very greatest masterpieces are allowed to go unread.

It was once the twofold aim of higher education, as formulated by President Jeremiah Day of Yale, to improve "the discipline and the furniture of the mind." Harvard's current innovation stresses the former at the expense of the latter. Granted there is solid merit in strengthening the mathematics requirement, in augmenting the basic initiations to science, or in requiring a course from a series entitled "Moral Reasoning." Well instructed citizens of the cybernetic future should unquestionably be enabled to program a computer. But will they not, more than ever, need to handle some foreign language, when world-wide communication is so urgent a necessity? The initial report envisaged the abolition of any language requirement whatsoever; pursuant to objections from the faculty, this was not implemented, and is currently under reconsideration. Within the category of "Foreign Cultures," the courses deal mainly with non-Western peoples, who cannot be approached except through translations. To ask for some acquaintance with a disparate culture, albeit the merest sampling, is readily justified. But the dangers of being ethnocentric are avoided at the risk of becoming ethnofugal. Tennyson may have been rather too culture-bound in preferring fifty years of Europe to a cycle of Cathay. Yet, in a day when the culturally uprooted are so fervently seeking to retrace their own roots and regain their own heritage, it seems odd that American heirs to the wisdom of the Classics and ^{the} Bible should be nudged along toward cultural deracination.

Sticking to the occident, under the heading of "Cultural Contexts," credit may be accrued by a course in Periclean Athens or by another in the Weimar Republic. We have come a long way, with the inference that both may be of equal pedagogic value. Austrian literature is given an explicit listing; English and American literatures are not. At this juncture, it becomes hard to distinguish between a core and a periphery. We are well aware that surveys, for progressive educators, have become anathemata. Yet no course can present

more than an epitome of its subject-matter perforce, and a survey has the benefit of presenting it in sequence and perspective. Both of these are abandoned by the section for "Historical Study," which emphasizes the present, on the one hand, and focusses on a small segment of the past--eras of crisis or processes of development--on the other. Neither preoccupation seems destined to give students much feeling for continuity or a frame of reference they can share. Because the furniture will be so incomplete and incongruous, to echo President Day's old-fashioned phrasing, their minds will not have been adequately stocked. "Modes of thought" are all-important, to be sure, but they should have something important to think about. Clearly the program has stimulated some able teachers into putting together some innovative offerings, just as General Education did in its heyday. But, as was not the case with General Education, one may look through the remainder of the catalogue and discern no logical reason for the system of priorities.

While they will have hardly any time for courses more broadly conceived yet unblessed with priority, undergraduates may be steered into studying "The Sublime in America" or "Tuberculosis in the Nineteenth Century." Both topics would be fascinating for qualified graduate seminars, and hint at pragmatic grounds for the shift of levels and the particularism of approaches. After all, our graduate schools have been shrinking, and our professors may be spending more of their efforts in college without having to broaden their professional specialties. The New York Times spoke truly when it saluted the new curriculum as "a radical departure from the established methods of undergraduate education." However, it did not notice that the reformers might have been constructing an educational Tower of Babel, where fewer and fewer speakers would be conversing in a common tongue. The hard core of learning has been softened and eroded, undergoing vicissitudes like those of hard-core pornography, to the extent that it cannot be reckoned with meaningfully as such. The formula turns out

to be too selective for genuine unity and too prescriptive for true diversity. In all likelihood, it will do much more to diversify than to unify. But if it proves diverse and undulating, in the adjectives of Montaigne, it thereby recalls his description of human nature, together with his paradoxical observation: "The most universal quality is diversity." The motto, if it assumed one, obviously would not be E pluribus unum. Rather more appropriately, it might be Ex uno plura.

But, with due allowance for undulations, does that not denote the prevailing wave everywhere: our one world fragmented in its worldviews, a global village segregated by its provincialities? Alfred North Whitehead, coming from England to Harvard in the mid-Twenties, warned: "The result of teaching small parts of a large number of subjects is the passive reception of disconnected ideas..." His philosophy drew its double strength from mathematics and classics, long reconciled at his older Cambridge. With us the tripartite allocation of fields is getting lopsided today; the sciences are expanding, the humanities contracting, the social studies jostling for position; and a report from Columbia has just counselled a pliant adaptation to this state of affairs. "Humanities?" says the gadgeteering composer John Cage, "Save them for your spare time. Concentrate on the Utilities." Is he trying to remind us that our words school, scholar, scholarship, are rooted in the Greek σχολή, meaning leisure? Would a wholly utilitarian preparation be more conducive to spending one's spare time among the liberal arts? Or is Mr. Cage implying that future humanists will not be generalists, but will perpetuate whatever they can for posterity by cultivating smaller and smaller gardens? The catalogues of our multiversities are the creeping indices of professionalism, not to mention vocationalism. The university itself had become a service station to Abraham Flexner in 1930; to David Riesman by 1968 the college was a vehicle for upward social mobility.

Lately, with experiments in open admissions, even the most elemental utilities have not been doing very well. Educators as old as I am have witnessed the full progression--or regression--of what might be named the McLuhan effect: the fact that childhood reading has been so deflected by audiovisual entertainment during the last three decades. Adolescent exposure to family bookshelves harboring Scott or Dickens has been a losing cause; intelligent young people, arriving at Shakespeare in college, have been missing out on the biblical and mythological allusions that he could assume with his own audience (experto credite). President Conant, who spent his elder years as a public consultant on secondary schooling, was ultimately and drastically inclined to "throw overboard," as he put it, "the notion of a unified coherent culture suitable to a democratic country in a scientific age," because it appeared to be less and less compatible with a pluralistic ideology. What we have been following, put otherwise, is no longer a shifting canon but a breakdown of the whole consensus, with an ensuing loss to cultural interaction and social intercommunication. Heads have been shaken about this ever since Matthew Arnold, and his critical heirs have exerted themselves to shore up the fragments of culture as he professed it. Both the late F.R. Leavis and the late Lionel Trilling cherished hopes that English literature might provide the groundwork for an intellectual, esthetic, and moral discipline which would compensate for the attrition of the classics.

But it is always later than we professors think. Mere anarchy has been visibly winning out over high culture, when Arnold's well-worn formulation --"the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world"--is looked upon as outdated. Now, if ever, we need a pedagogy which can discern and propagate, which can affirm and hold together, a community of ideas. Without this, mankind would be losing its most valued patrimony, its collective memory; and we have seen what wrong turns history can take when

it is made by persons and peoples ill versed in it. Without a recallable past, we should live our lives groping through uncharted territory, amid the nebulous skies and lunar landscapes and unrecognizable landmarks and faceless androids of science-fiction--a world which gets made up as it goes along. I am not temperamentally disposed to indulge in diatribe or jeremiad. Yet I should be purblind and disloyal to my nurture, if I failed to note what is happening before my eyes and may be spreading through the academic stratosphere, thereby blurring the crucial differences between a well-tested canon and a well-advertised package. Higher education, across the centuries, has constituted a continuous dialogue between the minds of ancestors and of contemporaries. If we, the latter, know any more than the former, it is because we have learned so much from them. As T.S. Eliot remarked, "They are that which we know." Naturally we may react against them, and the reactions would not prove unproductive if they pointed towards a dialectical synthesis.

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